

Street musicians collaborate trans-planet in the name of peace

Written by Kam Williams



The first time Mark Johnson heard Roger Ridley singing “Stand by Me,” he was so moved by the passion in the elderly black man’s voice, he wanted to share it with the world. However, that seemed like an improbable dream, because Roger was obscure even in their hometown of Santa Monica, California where he was just a street musician playing for tips in the public square.

But then Mark thought about the fact that there must many other equally-talented, yet unrecognized individuals performing outdoors, essentially for free, in cities all over the planet. So, he decided to create a mobile recording studio in order to give them a chance to collaborate with each other without meeting. Since music is the universal language, he hoped to deliver a powerful message about its power to unite the human race by weaving a unique tapestry of tunes with folks from a diversity of backgrounds.

Therefore, with the help of co-director Jonathan Walls, he proceeded to prove that the world is indeed a global village via a project which would take them from Brazil to South Africa to Russia to Holland to Italy to Spain to Ireland to France to Israel to Palestine to Nepal to India and back to the United States. The fruit of those labors is *Playing for Change: Songs around the World*, a soul-stirring DVD and CD which offers its audience one of the most satisfying listening experiences imaginable.

Despite the physical distance and considerable cultural differences among the contributors, they combined to create some beautiful music. For instance, it is nothing short of amazing to hear how Ridley’s lead vocals blend with that of the gravelly-throated Grandpa Elliot, as well as with one-man band Washboard Chaz, Native American drummers, a Russian cellist, a Zulu acappella group, plus numerous additional accompanists for an unforgettable version of “Stand by Me.”

Besides featuring novel renditions of such classic songs as “One Love,” “Talkin’ ‘Bout a Revolution,” and “A Change Is Gonna Come,” to name a few, the DVD captures the colorful essence of each port-of-call, given that each session was shot outdoors and up against a visually-captivating background.

Perhaps the picture’s most poignant moment arrives when Irishman Liam O’ Maonlai pauses from playing the didgeridoo on “Biko” to summarize his basic philosophy of life. “I believe in my

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brothers and sisters all over the world, and that we will see this Earth to be ours,” he says matter-of-factly. “We have an ability to look after one another, and an ability to share. It’s our place, our world, it’s our planet. It’s ours!”

Here, here! Or should I say, hear, hear!

Excellent (4 stars)

Unrated

Running time: DVD - 83 minutes, CD - 45 minutes.

Studio: Concord Music Group

DVD Extras: “The Filmmakers’ Journey,” a behind-the-scenes featurette, and “The Playing for Change Foundation,” a documentary focusing on the inspiring work of the project’s non-profit organization. .

To order a copy of the *Playing for Change* DVD/CD, visit: <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001QOOCTE?ie=UTF8&tag=thslfofire-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B001QOOCTE>

To see street musicians performing *Stand by Me* in *Playing for Change*, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Us-TVg40ExM>

To see street musicians performing *One Love* in *Playing for Change*, visit: <http://www.playingforchange.com/journey/introduction>